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ABSTRACT

Foreign language teaching is currently in a state of flux, as is natural when any discipline is undergoing basic theoretical and procedural revision. The behaviorist trends applied to the audio-lingual habit theory were a major break-through for foreign language teaching, and skills ignored by the grammar-translation method were brought to the fore. Today, joint research in linguistics, sociology, and psychology has resulted in a much more complete and comprehensive statement as to the nature of language itself, the nature of learning a language, and the nature of language functioning within society. The author discusses some of these findings and how they could be integrated into a new foreign language teaching methodology and consequent classroom procedures. A "possible class schema" for foreign language instruction concludes this paper. (AMM)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING:
A BRIEF STATE OF THE ART

AL 002 404

by Carolyn B. Duffy

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A BRIEF STATE OF THE ART

As with most areas of education, foreign language teaching is currently undergoing a re-examination of its basic proposes and procedures. It is the purpose of this paper to present the recent developments in related social sciences, which must be considered in order to initiate the most essential and effective changes in the program.

In terms of the purposes of a foreign language program, aside from its humanistic appeal, it is necessary to define more specifically and operationally what such a program should do. Borrowing a term from psychological learning theories, this may be expressed as the "terminal behavior" we wish to develop. Since second language learning occurs also outside the classroom, evidenced in the natural bilingual speaker, it is expedient to examine just what enters into such linguistic behavior, and to what degree our classroom product should resemble the natural bilingual. Joshua A. Fishman has defined bilingualism as the "demonstrated ability to engage in communication via more than one language."[1] From this very general definition foreign language teachers need to form a more restricted definition.

It is important first to give some thought to what "language" encompasses for the native speaker. When understood as a means of communication, language is more than the linguistic code (as viewed by the descriptive linguist); it becomes a consequence of social behavior (as viewed by the sociolinguist). Its scope includes not only the linguistic repertoire of the speaker, but extra-linguistic considerations, such as cultural information, social structure, participant evaluation and the topic. To try to develop bilingualism in the classroom, no matter the degree, by presenting only the linguistic material is to teach not "language" but "language-like behavior."

When understood in this broader definition of language, bilingualism must be examined as to its contexts and its processes.[2] By outlining the basic contexts of bilingualism, within which language functions, we get a fair idea of those elements which need to be utilized in the classroom: a more detailed description will follow in a later section.

Such a framework would include a statement of the choice of language media desired for use in the classroom; speaking, reading, or writing. The learner must function as both a producer and receiver of messages. He must discriminate in formality levels and choose linguistic items acceptable to the level in use. The teacher himself must ask, "About what topics and to what range of social types do I want my pupils to be able to communicate?" This framework actually becomes a model of performance, in transformationalist terms. It treats language as behavior,

and emphasizes its impact in actual use. The classroom teacher must utilize such a model of performance in the language classroom from the first day if a well balanced bilingualism is to be achieved. An evaluation of this performance is defined according to several points of view. Linguistically it might be in terms of absence of interference. Psychologists refer to automaticity of response and facility of speech. Sociologists might suggest proper evaluation of the social structure, and pedagogically it might be referred to in terms of the size of the linguistic repertoire.[3] Combining all of these into a more concise statement we could ambitiously specify that the terminal behavior we desire is achieved when the speaker posesses the cultural competence and the linguistic competence of the native speaker. What this competence implies will be specified later.

Bilingualism is also stated in terms of mental processes, the realm of psycholinguistics; these are the compound versus the co-ordinate system. From linguistic and psychological research we find that a compound bilingual tends to fuse the two languages into one, and tends to confuse the two systems. This results in heavy interference from his native language in each component; semantic, syntactic and phonological. The co-ordinate bilingual keeps each of his languages separate and "thinks" in each, suffering no such interference. In the classroom, the co-ordinate system is the one which we should try to develop.

The discussion of bilingualism and foreign language teaching has

touched on developments in linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. Each of these fields is involved in language behavior, and they are inter-related at many points. In terms of our specified terminal behavior of cultural and linguistic competence we may well ask what theories must be used and procedures adopted in our classroom, and how recent findings in the related social sciences can help us.

Theoretical Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching:

Theoretical linguistics has made great progress in recent decades, specifically since the publication of Noam Chomsky's Syntactic Structures in 1957. Chomsky discusses linguistic theory within the framework of a language-acquisition device, which for him is an innate human capacity.[4] Transformationalist grammatical theory is based on the "creative aspect" of language. Most linguists generally agree that this theory most adequately describes language, since it will "generate" all of the grammatical sentences of a language and no ungrammatical ones. In addition, a generative transformational grammar, through transformational rules, can posit relationships between grammatical categories and sentences, and in this way better account for the production and comprehension of sentences not previously encountered. Such a grammar is much more powerful than earlier ones, since it most fully describes the underlying structure of a language as an inter-related system; the structure assigned to an

utterance indicates how this utterance is understood by the ideal speaker-hearer. In light of current psychological studies of mental processes and learning theory, such a theory of grammar may become a basic component in any methodological statement of second language teaching.

Chomsky also makes several distinctions relevant to language instruction. One such distinction is that between linguist competence, which is the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language, and linguistic performance, the actual use of language in concrete situations. A grammar of language then is a structural description of linguistic competence and is the domain of the theoretical linguist. Linguist performance, on the other hand, deals with language use, and as such includes both psychological and sociological implications. To date no complete model of performance has been devised. However, as previously stated, the language teacher who is trying to achieve "language" competence must utilize such imperfect models as those presented by the sociolinguist. By realizing the limitations, as well as the capabilities of a "grammar" of a language, the teacher is better able to determine what her task must be. Keeping in mind the distinction between competence and performance, the teacher is able to view student errors with more understanding of the source of the mistake. Being aware of the grammars of both the native and the target language, and their contrastive system, she can more accurately analyze the error in linguistic competence committed by the learner.

Chomsky also differentiates between deep and surface structure of language. The deep structure of language includes the basic concepts and categories of human communication, and may be similar for all languages, as evidenced in linguistic universals. Surface structure is the manifestation of these categories in each particular language. The concept of deep and surface structure in second language instruction is extremely useful when dealing with the semantic and syntactic components of the languages. Certain concepts in one language may be manifested in the second language in a different way. The reality may be more differentiated or more generalized. This is most obvious in lexicon, but there are parallels in the syntactic component which may be presented through its structural rules.

Perhaps the most important contribution of generative grammar to foreign language teaching will be in the devising of new pedagogical grammars. The impact of the descriptive linguistics of the 40's and 50's emphasized more the form of pedagogical grammars and less the content; the preoccupation was on "how" to effect language skills, rather than on the nature of the language being taught.[5] Relying heavily on the behavioristic trends of the times, this "form" resulted in the procedures used in audio-lingual habit theory.

Recent studies in generative grammar have had two important consequences on language teaching. First, they have made explicit the kind of capacities a language learner must have if he is to approximate the

competence of a native speaker; what in general and particular must be learned. Second, they stress that mere skill building is not enough; language learning must exploit the communicative, creative, generative aspect of linguistic ability. The most important contribution of generative grammar is that it enables text book writers to base their material on the most adequate linguistic description.[6] Perhaps of less importance is its use in ordering or sequencing material. However, it is useful in making claims about the kind of information needed in the basic structure; it is pedagogically easier to proceed from a formally marked distinction to a case of structural ambiguity. Finally, to the extent that drills must be used in the classroom, it provides the best basis for structurally accurate drills.

Transformational grammarians and psychologists have both made important discoveries in the area of language acquisition; psychology, especially, is interested in its relation to learning theory. Chomsky, in Aspects of Syntax, clearly describes two historical views of language acquisition. One such view is empirical, and holds that the structure of a language acquisition device is limited to certain "peripheral processing mechanisms," along with certain elementary principles of generalization and association, classification and segmentation. The preliminary analysis of experience is conducted by these peripheral processing mechanisms; further concepts and knowledge are acquired by inductive principles and gained through experience.[7]

Opposed to the empiricists notion has been the rationalist approach to language acquisition, of which the transformationalist grammarian is a proponent. This view holds that beyond the peripheral processing mechanisms there are innate ideas and principles which serve to determine the form of acquired knowledge in a highly organized way. This innate mechanism becomes activated on presentation of appropriate stimulation. In this view a child can not help but learn the language spoken in his environment, since the schema of its grammar is an inherent human characteristic. This also supposes that this innate grammatical schema will be similar in all speakers, no matter the superficial differences in the languages of their environments (deep and surface structure of language, according to Chomsky) and that these similarities will appear as certain linguistic universals which in turn substantiate a "general theory of grammar."

It has been stated that the earlier empirical views were akin to the philosophy of earlier descriptive, data-oriented linguists.[8] Empirical notions of learning were also expounded by behaviorist psychologists, specifically Skinner and his conditioning procedures. As regards foreign language instruction, the audio-lingual habit theory has been linked to empirical thinking mainly through its dependence on behaviorist psychology.

The rationalist position on language acquisition is more in line with current gestaltist psychology, which emphasizes the importance of perceiving the "structure as a whole" of what is to be learned. It also

lends itself to the theory of foreign language teaching known as cognitive code-learning, which modifies the audio-lingual and grammar-translation theories and uses the best points of both.

Learning Theory and Foreign Language Teaching:

One type of learning which has been most successful in experimental work with animals is the theory of operant conditioning as proposed by Skinner. The application of the principles of operant conditioning to second language learning, however, have met with much less success.

Language is described for this theory as a set of skills to be learned, and Skinner applies his techniques of conditioning to shape the desired skill. Briefly, Skinner divides behavior into respondent and operant responses. The respondent is a response elicited by an observable stimulus, as in classical conditioning. Operant responses are emitted, with no obvious stimulus to be found. The proper response is developed by reinforcing an emitted response if it is an approximation of the desired terminal response, "shaping" the emitted response toward ever closer approximations. Such reinforcement is known as reinforcing stimulus, since it in turn will increase the rate of response.

In terms of foreign language teaching these behaviorist principles were applied to produce the audio-lingual habit theory, and are today the basis of programmed instruction. The linguistic base of the audio-lingual theory was taxonomic and data-oriented, relying on word classes,

loose generalizations and analogies. The result was teaching procedure based on the following basic tenets: The correct order of skills presentation was listening, speaking, reading and finally writing; mastery in one skill was required before passing on to the next. It required authentic models, orally produced, to be learned by mim-mem techniques. There was also extensive memorization and manipulation through pattern practice drills of illustrative sentences of the language. It supposed inductive learning by analogy. Results were that at the end of a language course few students were able to use the language creatively, although they might be able to respond in language-like behavior to grammatical cues. The use of repetition and pattern drills in a stimulus-response fashion does not provide the student with an internalized set of linguistic rules by which he can actually generate new sentences for the purpose of communication. Traditionally, the language learner has been expected to listen to, imitate, and extensively drill sentences which to him are often semantically and contextually meaningless. Although older students also use inductive principles to structure reality, it seems that through the process of maturation they lose somewhat the child-like ability found in first language acquisition.[9] It is more difficult for them to formulate linguistic rules through analogy and generalization upon the presentation of only a limited corpus of the language, using memorization, repetition and drills.

This is not to say that a certain element of language is not habit, nor that habit formation should not be a part of second language learning. It is to say that a revision of priorities in language presentation is sorely needed. Since the audio-lingual habit theory has been the approach used prevalently in language classrooms throughout the country, it would seem that a rethinking of basic theories would be necessary if language instruction were to improve, and our terminal behavior as previously stated be achieved.

A contradictory "biological" learning theory based on psycho-linguistic research has revealed the following insights. Closely following the Rationalist theory of language acquisition and transformationalist views of grammar and innate language capacity, this theory supposes that language is not merely a set of skills, but an inter-related system of structures to be used for communication. In such a theory the learner becomes an active ingredient in the language acquisition process, and factors such as his age, motivation, and mental capacities must be considered. It is the task of second language teaching to present the proper environment for the underlying structure of the language to become apparent to the learner. Based on knowledge of first language acquisition and mature mental processes, the biological learning theory realizes that the learner spontaneously categorizes the linguistic data. It presents the structure as a complete system which allows the student to grasp the essentials of the structure and utilize his inherent creative

ability in the new language. Rather than entirely eliminate errors by allowing only parrot-like responses, the student at each stage of learning is constantly revising his acquired knowledge to accomodate new information and linguistic data, much as a child when learning a first language.,

Such principles as these are today being incorporated into the cognitive code-learning theory, and its modified counterparts in individual classrooms. The basic ingredients of this theory include a renewed emphasis on study and analysis of the structures of a language as a body of knowledge, using transformationalist principles, and then presenting the language in use in meaningful situations.[10] Here again the dichotomy between competence and performance becomes clear. The native speaker's competence is exhibited in language used in communication, language used creatively, for the purpose of expressing certain needs and drives in a social situation. The second language learner in the high school classroom brings with him such a complete competence in his native language--a linguistic and cultural competence well established and concepts of reality which are quite sophisticated. It is quite unnatural then to expect him to learn a second language which is all too often presented devoid of any such contextual component. The area of research best able to inform the language teacher as to the composition of this contextual component is Sociolinguistics.

Sociolinguistics and Foreign Language Teaching:

Sociolinguistics is concerned with the social implications of the use and reception of language; it views language as a form of social behavior, and as such must ascribe to an utterance the relevant contextual features as well as the linguistic features. Recent sociolinguistic studies, such as those done by Susan Ervin-Tripp and J.B. Pride, have formulated a set of sociolinguistic rules which would function in a speaker much as linguistic rules do--below the level of consciousness. Familiarity with these findings would allow the foreign language teacher a more systematic, concise way of presenting language within a context of situation.

Briefly, in sociolinguistics the form of the verbal message is dependent on the participants, the ecological surroundings, ie. the knowledge of the cultural and social structure, and the topic of conversation.[11] The speaker-hearer must be able to, first, make a proper perception of the situation, and second, to verbalize within these contextual constraints. Perception depends on factors from both the sociological code and the linguistic code; the speaker must perceive certain clues for behavioral strategy, and then select proper referents. Determinants of verbalization include his knowledge of the linguistic repertoire, the culture and the social structure, and his ability to relate these.[12] He must relate by a system of code selection rules the Social

Situation A to the Linguistic Variable A. Such a system of code-selection gives him what Hymes calls communicative competence, encompassing cultural and sociolinguistic competence.

Possible Application of Theoretical Knowledge to Classroom Practice:

The first step in the difficult task of transferring the large body of theoretical knowledge to practice would, it seems to me, be in the area of materials preparation. Without adequate text and tape materials at his disposal, the teacher is left either to muddle along trying to incorporate new ideas to existing texts, which is both frustrating and usually unsuccessful, or to devote unrealistic amounts of time and energy to both devising materials and teaching them.

We have seen how the generative-transformational theory of grammar more explicitly gives a structural description of the language. Pedagogical implications would be that textbook writers can now base their materials on the most adequate description of the language and know what explicitly has to be learned to provide the basic underlying structure of the language. The student, when presented language as such a system, will be better able to grasp the essentials of the whole, and begin much earlier to generate acceptable novel utterances.

Materials writers must also re-examine the format currently used in audio-lingual texts. As previously mentioned, it has consisted

mainly of a dialog, to be imitated through repetition and memorized, and followed by the pattern drill of certain structures contained in the dialogue. In view of the above psychological findings, we know that memorization does not equal internalization, nor does manipulation on cue equal production. A drill alone, whether based on structuralist or transformational models, does not do the job specified in our terminal behavior--to develop linguistic and communicative competence. Therefore the materials developer must consider his drills in relation to the function of the classroom teacher. Recent studies in programmed instruction offer some valuable programs aimed at specific skill development.[13] Particularly the program of Guided Instruction, as proposed by Valdman, has begun to integrate programmed instruction with classroom activities.[14] This type of instruction, preceeded by adequate analysis, can be used to best advantage for that portion of language learning in which habits must be formed. Valdman proposes three divisions to Guided Instruction: programmed instruction, sessions with a native speaker devoted to conversation, and then teacher analysis. In the current public educational program of most high schools such a program could never get off the ground, both for financial reaosns and the lack of physical facilities--native speakers and adequate classroom space. However, the introduction of the language laboratory in conjunction with audio-lingual learning has made this almost standard equipment in most language programs. Proper use by materials developers could provide

students with excellent programmed instruction using the language lab. In addition, a native speaker is not absolutely essential when the teacher himself has sufficient linguistic and cultural competence in the language he is teaching. A firm foundation in the transformational grammar of the target language and awareness of the cultural context within which that language functions would allow him to present the structural rules and code-selection rules quite adequately.

The pedagogical grammar--the text--should present the underlying structures of the language, utilizing transformational principles. The teacher should serve to provide the environmental stimuli in which the language comes into actual use, conversational situations. Another pedagogical implication from learning theory deals with presenting the relationships within the target language itself. For example, utilizing the kernel sentence of one type, it could be presented in contrast to a derived sentence. This would reduce the risk of overlearning one item in isolation, and therefore blocking the contrasted structure when presented later. Such a technique holds for the semantic as well as syntactic component of language. Perhaps pattern drills based on this intra-language contrastive principle would break the monotony usually encountered in drilling. When working with meaningful material both learning and retention are facilitated.[15]

This would seem to account for the syntactic and semantic components of language. The phonological component, the sound system of language,

must receive equal attention. This component is particularly adaptable to programmed lab instruction. Mastering a new sound system involves first, an ability to discriminate the new sound, and second, the ability to produce the sound automatically. The second skill is a matter of motor-habit formation. Studies have shown that well designed discriminatory instruction before sound production results in measurably better pronunciation skills.[16] Pronunciation drills, utilizing operant conditioning, serve to shape the desired behavior into a habit.

The success of a foreign language program depends on several factors, the student, the teacher, and the methodology and procedures among them. The age of the learner is crucial in effective instruction planning. A child acquiring a second language may be able to analogize and grasp the essentials of the underlying structure much quicker and easier than an older learner. For the older learner it would be more beneficial to give a great deal of explanation and carefully guided rule presentation toward correct hypotheses. According to learning theory, it is much better to provoke correct generated utterances, for unlearning and relearning is a difficult and frustrating experience. However, the older learner should not be so restricted that he has no opportunity to be "creative" within the language. In my opinion, mistakes made by a student who is completely involved in "communication" in the target language are worth the time needed to correct an incorrect utterance. In this way errors are often an important teaching device. It causes the learner to reflect on his

"internalized structure" and make the proper adjustment himself.

For older learners too, it is advisable to present as soon as feasible the whole system of the language, albeit incomplete in some complexities. Psychological theory by gestaltists have reaffirmed the fact that matured mental processes strive to structure reality as a complete entity.[17] Such a spiral approach to language learning also keeps student motivation high, since meaningful communication is possible at an early stage, and the student has a more actual feeling of progress.

For optimal success in the conversational sessions it is best to have small, homogenously grouped classes, ranging from 6 to 10 students. Although public education holds this to be an almost impossible ideal, for foreign language classes where it is <u>essential</u> that each student engage in as much conversational practice as possible it is a necessary prerequisite. If such a class is impossible to attain, there are various ways to provide for subdivisions within a larger class; one group could be engaged in programmed lab work while the other is engaged in conversation.

Again taking into account the age of the older learner, who has already mastered all the media of his native language, the sequence speaking, reading, writing, need not be kept separate and presented in a linear fashion. Learning theory has shown that for older learners things presented <u>only</u> aurally are not as easily learned as when presented visually.

Presenting the materials by using these media simultaneously would undoubtably make a stronger impression, hence facilitate learning and retention.

Theories of association also show that the number of associations established in relation to an item will increase its ability to be retained and internalized.[18] As mentioned above, presenting structures or concepts in contrast within the language would also increase their associative value. In intra-language association, integration of sounds and words into higher order units is achieved only through repeated experience of these elements as a unit, tied to certain contextual stimuli. Phrases, rather than words or morphemes are the units which the student must call up when using the language for communication.[19]

As regards the necessary contextual stimuli, work in sociolinguistics (Tripp, Pride) has provided the foreign language teacher with a basic framework in which to systematically present language as a form of social behavior.[20] This entails first, the use of segmented units of speech, known as speech acts: apologies, greetings, invitations, and so on to more abstract units. The next higher segmentation might be called the topic: an explicit message with informational content, and its corresponding linguistic counterpart. For example, such topics of every day life provide an excellent starting point for guided meaningful communication. Expanded to become the message, where there is a two-term

relationship between participants, the social features of the situation become relevant, as well as the intent of the message. Social features with cultural implications, ie. honorifics, politeness forms, deference forms, and formality levels (formal versus causal) must be introduced to the student. The social features most important in the culture of the target language would receive top priority. Summarized, language as a social behavior can be taught in micro-units, such as speech acts, or in macro-units, ranging from the Episode to the sentence. Factors which must be integrated to form a "communicative competence" are: the message criteria, structural or linguistic units, and intonational contours.[21]

Possible Class Schema: Basic Course in Foreign Language Instruction

Time available: 50 minute class, meeting five times a week.

Class size and composition: The optimum is a class size of eight, as homogenously grouped as possible. Presumably those students in a language class would choose to be there. If the language program is compulsory, the teacher should strive to group students with similar motivation and language ability together. Those who for reasons of motivation or ability need to progress at a slower pace could be best handled in a separate group. A proper evaluation of the student is one of the most important factors in successful language teaching.

Class materials:

A. Programmed instruction through the language lab.

1. Phonological Drills:

Drills based on sound discrimination.

Drills on intonation contours in the target language.

Specific contrastive inter and intra-language drills: for example, in teaching English to speakers of Spanish such work would include the pronouncing of final consonants, proper vowel sounds, liaison between sound "phrases" rather than individual words.

2. Structural Drills:

Based on an adequate pedagogical grammar.

Emphasis should be on structural relationships rather than substitution-repetition etc.

Examples of structural drills in English:

Kernel	Tape:	John went to school	
Transformation	S:	Did John go to school?	Reinforcement
	Tape:	Where	
	S:	Where did John go?	"
	Tape:	What	
	S:	What did John do?	"

Text:

A pedagogical grammar based on transformationalist principles, composed of:

A situationally oriented dialogue or short reading.

Adequate description of the basic structures in the dialogue or reading.

Well designed, meaningful exercises utilizing the structures.

Teacher:

Would function to fuse linguistic and cultural competence into communicative performance.

Present the dialogue, asking students to repeat; books should be open to achieve both a visual and aural impression.

Immediate explanation of the new structures of lexical items:

By relating the new to familiar material. A structure may be contrasted with one already learned.

New lexical items are immediately put into contexts; several exemplary sentences could be given and repeated and written down.

Immediate teacher-student question-answer about the topic of the dialogue or reading:

Begin with actual material: Who are the participants? What are they doing? etc. until Tell me what happened.

Student-student question-answer: Teacher; Ask Mr.X what the boy is doing. Student; Mr.X, what is the boy doing? etc.

Relate the dialogue or reading to the students' own experiences.

Care must be taken to work within the student's existing structural and lexical system in the target language.

Division of class time:

20 min: Programmed tapes on previous materials.

30 min: In class discussions; review of previous dialogues or readings through question-answer or general conversation, with no text. Presentation of new material, with text.

This basic schema could be continued until the student had sufficiently, though not necessarily completely, mastered the basic structural system of the language. At that point time could be directed toward more complete mastery of structure, vocabulary building, idiomatic uses, and polishing distinctions between formal and casual lexical items and expressions. As much time as possible should be spent in conversation.

The above procedures should by no means be static. The ability of the teacher to capitalize on her perception of the students' day-to-day attitudes, spontaneous situations which often arise, and various presentation

techniques, is perhaps the most important factor in a successful language program. When possible other sensory devices should be incorporated. Movies in the target language are an excellent way of holding the student's attention, and presenting the language in a context not possible within the classroom.

The state of the art in foreign language teaching is currently in a state of flux, as is natural when any discipline is undergoing basic theoretical and procedural revisions. The behaviorist trends applied to the audio-lingual habit theory were a major break-through for foreign language teaching, and skills ignored by the grammar-translation method were brought to the fore. Today, joint research in linguistics, sociology and psychology has resulted in a much more complete and comprehensive statement as to the nature of language itself, the nature of learning a language, and the nature of language functioning within society. The above suggestions of how these findings could possibly be integrated into a new foreign language teaching methodology and consequent classroom procedures is only a beginning. The research being done does, however, merit the attention of educational policy makers, materials developers, and any person contemplating teaching a foreign language.

FOOTNOTES

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3. Ibid., p. 127.

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21. J.B. Pride, "Notes on Current Developments in the Study of Language in Culture and Society", (ERIC ED020502).

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